

sterilant into the interior of the container; and

a third supply source of a hot sterile drying air for activating and drying the
sterilant in the interior of the container.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, further including a heater for adding additional heat to the atomized sterilant.
3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the container is a bottle.
4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the sterilant is hydrogen peroxide.
5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the supply source of sterilant includes a spoon dipper apparatus.
6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the atomizing system further includes an atomizing venturi.
7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the second supply source of hot sterile air further includes a humidity control system for maintaining the humidity of the hot sterile air.
8. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the probe for applying the sterilant is a spray nozzle.

10. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein after drying the container interior surface retains a concentration of hydrogen peroxide less than .5 PPM.

b2 Sub c2 11. (Amended) A method comprising:

providing a first supply of sterile air;
providing a supply of sterilant;
producing an atomized sterilant by mixing the first supply of sterile air with the
sterilant;
providing a second supply of hot sterile air to the atomized sterilant;
providing a probe extending into an interior of a container for applying the
atomized sterilant into the interior of the container; and
supplying a third supply of hot sterile drying air for activating and drying the
sterilant in the interior of the container.

12. The method of claim 11, further including the step of providing a heater for adding additional heat to the atomized sterilant.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the container is a bottle.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the sterilant is hydrogen peroxide.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of supplying a supply of sterilant further includes the step of providing a spoon dipper apparatus for measuring the quantity of the sterilant.

16. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of producing an atomized sterilant further includes providing an atomizing venturi for mixing the first supply of sterile air with the sterilant.

17. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of providing a second source of hot sterile air further includes providing a humidity control system for maintaining the humidity of the hot sterile air.

18. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of supplying a probe further includes providing a spray nozzle for applying the sterilant.

20. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of supplying a third supply of hot sterile drying air further includes the interior of the container retaining a concentration of hydrogen peroxide less than .5 PPM.

21. (Amended) Apparatus comprising:

means for supplying a first source of sterile air;

means for supplying a source of sterilant;

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means for providing an atomizing system for producing an atomized sterilant from the mixing of sterile air from the first source of sterile air with the sterilant;

means for supplying a second source of hot sterile air to the atomized sterilant;

means for applying the atomized sterilant to an interior of a container by extending a probe into the interior of the container; and

means for supplying a third source of hot sterile drying air into the interior of the container for activating and drying the sterilant.

22. The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the means for supplying a third source of hot sterile drying air further includes a means for providing a residual concentration of hydrogen peroxide less than .5 PPM.

REMARKS:

Reconsideration and allowance are respectfully requested in view of the Remarks below.

The status of the claims are as follows: Claims 1 - 22 were presented for prosecution. Claims 9 and 19 were previously canceled. Claims 1 - 8, 10 - 18, and 20 - 22 presently remain pending for consideration.

Claims 1-2, 4-8, 10-12, 14-18 and 20-22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable by Kelbrick et al. in view of Hirayama . The Examiner contends that Kelbrick et al. in combination with Hirayama discloses the claimed invention.

The Applicants traverse the 103(a) rejection with the following arguments. Kelbrick et